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THE
BYEWAYS
OF
THE BIBLE.



THE
BYEWAYS OF THE BIBLE;

OR,

A SERIES OF BRIEF STUDIES
ON CERTAIN SELDOM NOTICED PASSAGES OF
HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY THE

REV. W. S. LEWIS, M.A.,

*Author of "Landmarks of Faith," "The Threshold of
Revelation," &c., &c.*



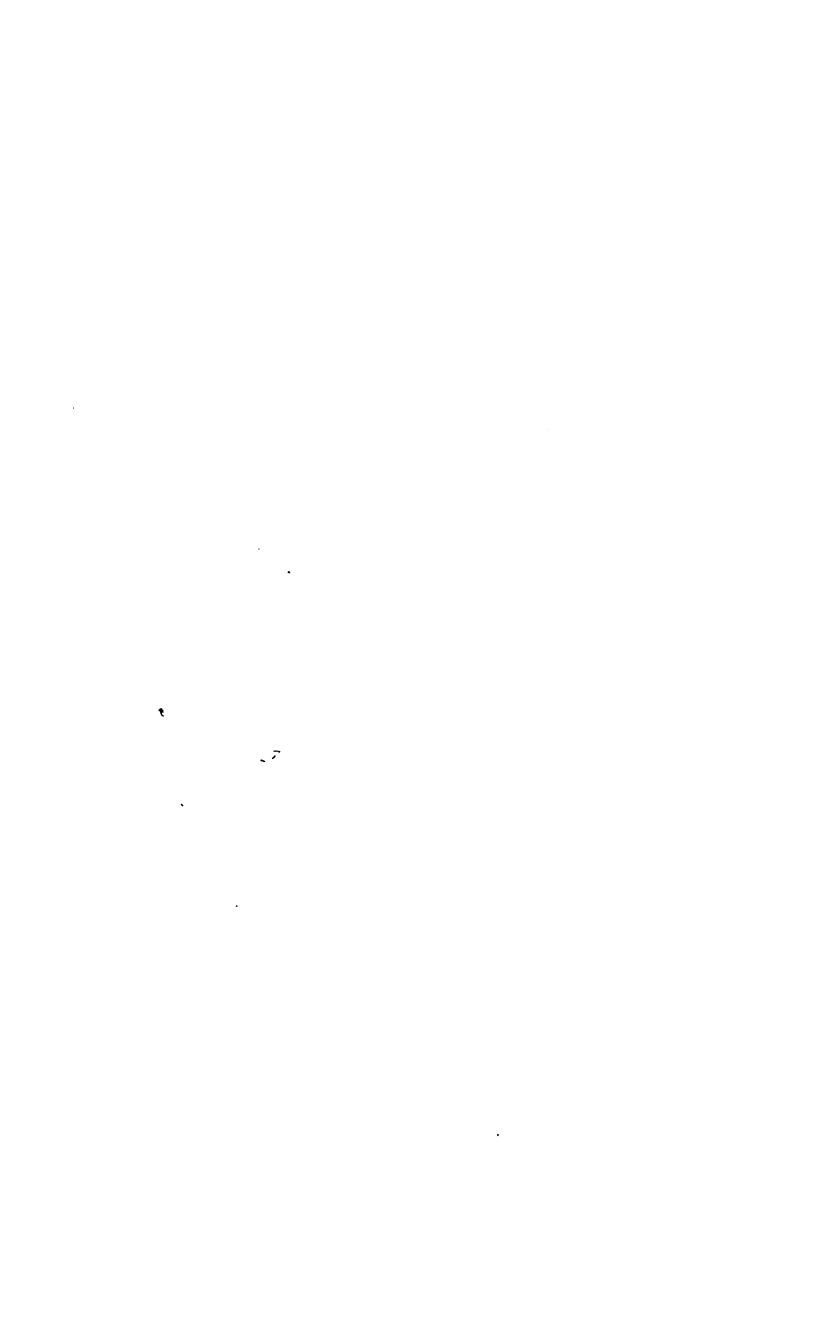
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NOTICE.

THIS little Volume, as its Title implies, endeavours to direct attention to such incidental and subordinate passages of Scripture, or to such branch lines of Scriptural inquiry, as are not usually discussed or met with in commentaries and sermons. It also seeks, in so doing, by studied brevity and conciseness, and by the general tone of its language, to meet the case of those persons who prefer devotional reading which shall lead and leave them to reflect and to judge for themselves. How far these objects will be thought worthy of attainment, and how far they will be regarded as attained, remain, of course, to be seen ; but the writer hopes that this preliminary statement of them will at least assist the reader in passing a fair judgment on what he reads.

ST. GEORGE'S, WORTHING, JAN. 1870.



THE BYEWAYS OF THE BIBLE.

No. I.

UNBELIEF TRIUMPHANT.

"They laughed him to scorn."—*Matt. ix. 24.*

You must often have noticed the effect of introducing a lamp into a darkened apartment. You see the lamp itself; you see a thousand other things by its light. It is much the same with the five words of our text. Spoken, as it were, by the way, they have not only all the vivid light of reality in themselves, but they also throw light on the whole history in which they occur. In particular they enlighten us, (1) On the Nature of our Saviour's Work, and (2) On the Right Interpretation of his Words.

First: As to HIS WORK. How wonderfully the words reveal to us the great depth of his humiliation. It was not only that the Lord was man, which is much; nor yet only that He was a very poor man, even one of the homeless poor (Luke ix. 58), which is more; but, what is most of all, that He was a man derided and despised. So psalmists and prophets had foretold, and

so evangelists here relate. Did it ever occur to you to consider how complete must have been the obscuration of His glory—how total the eclipse of that sun—to render this even possible? Had there been one scintillation or glimpse to the natural eye of the burning brightness of his Godhead, would any one have dared, would any one have been able, to “deride” Him? They “laughed him down,” so some render the expression; they drowned his words in contempt! To be worshipped by all the “gods” (Ps. xcvi. 7; Heb. i. 6); that was His right. To be the laughing-stock of men such as these, of the idle crowd that collect and gossip about a death, the hireling mourners who feel least and pretend most; that was His experience. The distance from that right to that experience is the measure of His humiliation.

Notice, also, from this, the completeness of His sorrow. He was “acquainted with grief,” with every side and shape and variety of it, even with that form which we should have expected to be the farthest of all from His lot. As one “born of woman,” we can partly understand His exposure to the sinless infirmities of our race, His hungering, thirsting, fainting, wearying, sleeping, bleeding, dying. In so wicked a world, again, as this is, His having to suffer from the opposition of enemies, and from the treachery and desertion of professed friends, is more disgraceful than surprising. But, coming into the world as He did, and being such as He was, speaking as man never spake, silencing the wisest, curing the most desperate, casting out the strongest,

changing the vilest, and speaking mercy to all—that He should, nevertheless, be derided and scorned; this is, indeed, strange. Any trial except this—so our expectation would have said. The inference is clear. If He was exposed to this, He was exempt from none. All the rest of the cup must have been exhausted before He partook of these dregs.

This consideration may teach us, yet further, the greatness of His love. All this depth of suffering was for our sake. It was because a half-exhausted cup would not have saved *us*, that He compelled Himself to drain all. Like one descending a coal shaft, who does not stop short of the very lowest depth because those he desires to rescue are known to be trembling and gasping there, so was it with the Lord. He endured even the scorn of contemptible man in order to save man. Strange, indeed, was that scorn; but stranger still His reply—not in judgment, not in anger, scarcely even in rebuke. Those who despised Him should not be witnesses of His power; that was all. Was there ever such a combination of majesty and mercy? Wherein is He the more to be admired—in His power, or in His forbearance—in raising the dead, or in sparing the living?

II. We learn much as to the right interpretation of our Lord's Words, and so, generally, of those Holy Scriptures which bear testimony to Him. The special saying which called forth this outburst of scorn was the following:—"The maid is not dead, but sleepeth;" and the

special ground of that scorn was the intimate conviction of the hearers that she had actually died—"knowing that she was dead." It is evident, therefore, that they took the Lord's words in their most ordinary and obvious sense, never stopping to search for another, and never considering whether such a teacher and miracle-worker as He was could have really meant anything so absurd. It was a case of confounding the obvious with the true—of mistaking the apparent for the real—and of considering "first thoughts" so much better than "second," that no second thoughts are required. The mistake is very common. "He that believeth on me shall never die;" "Ye must be born again;" "Destroy this temple;" "This is my body," all are cases in point. The mistake arises from not recollecting—(1) That the true signification of a passage is not that which the hearer imagines, but that which the speaker himself designed; and (2) That, in the sayings of the Bible, where God is practically the speaker, and man the hearer, these two meanings are so far from being necessarily identical, that they are often as wide asunder as the poles. The fact is, that the common clay of our earthly language must frequently be employed by the Almighty after a super-earthly and heavenly manner, and consequently must frequently mean other and more than if it had come from our lips. We must, never, therefore, run away with that notion, which seems to furnish so easy a way of closing all controversy, and which is so flattering and fascinating to dull and indolent minds, that what is called a plain man's view of a

passage is necessarily its plain meaning. There is no such democratic road to the truth. It is not by one passage, but by many—it is by searching the Scriptures, not by skimming them—it is by seeking not the obvious but the consistent, that we can learn what God means. “The kingdom of heaven is a treasure hid in a field,”—not something lying on its surface like a stone, and meeting your eye the first thing.

Let us not rashly, therefore, set aside non-obvious interpretations, especially if they are old ones sanctioned by centuries of experience and investigation. Even wholly new ones, if *founded on new knowledge*, must be cautiously and candidly examined. Above all, let us maintain our deep reverence for the Scripture itself as it is. Before you despise the Bible, be sure you understand it. How much flippant talking and scornful writing this simple rule would prevent. Many sceptics are really despising nothing but their own mis-interpretations, and are objects, therefore, not indeed of unchristian scorn, but of sincere compassion for their pains. It was so in this case. How true and precious the words which these scorners despised! What, indeed, was *that* death, lying in the path of His purposes, but a sleep? (See John xi. 11.) What is all death but a sleep before Him? (Luke xx. 38, etc.) What truth, what life, therefore, in His words to the parents! What truth, what life, what immortality, to all believers! How worthy of Him who “hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel!” And how unutterably pitiable the scorn, therefore, with which they were heard!

As a concluding thought, take notice of the profound wisdom here displayed. See how this very contempt of man was made to minister to the mission of Christ. These scornors actually built up the platform on which the evidence of the miracle stood. When the damsel arose and took food (Mark v. 43), there could be no doubt as to her being alive. The only point on which doubt was possible was as to the nature of her life. Was it resurrection-life in real truth? Had it indeed been preceded by unmistakeable death? These unhappy despisers, without meaning it, had established this beyond doubt; they had shut their own mouths on this point by their previous scorn; and, in doing so, they had for ever shut the mouths of mankind. So complete was the ultimate triumph of the wisdom of God. And even so will it be at the last with all wilful despisers of His Christ. "Every knee shall bow to Him," not only "of things in heaven and things in earth," but even of "things under the earth," such as these!

No. II.

UNBELIEF IN DESPAIR.

“The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death.”—*John* xii. 10.

FROM this text, and its immediate context, several important truths arise at once. It is clear, *e.g.*, that the resurrection of Lazarus was widely known and reported; otherwise so many persons would not have made a journey specially to see him. It is clear, again, that many of those who went to see and examine for themselves were fully convinced of the reality of his resurrection; otherwise their examination would rather have prevented belief in Christ than produced it. (Ver. 11.) And it is evident, further, that the Jewish priests themselves could neither disprove nor deny that which was so generally believed in; otherwise, without seeking further means of opposition, they would have done so out of hand. We seem, therefore, to have in our text an account of the consultations of despair; and of the dreadful degree of evil to which desperate men may be led. It will be instructive to note in this view, (1) The great wickedness of the deed designed; (2) The still greater wickedness of its motive.

I. Note then, first, of the thing designed, that it was the shedding of innocent blood. This assertion is very safe. When we remember the character of that family in Bethany to which Lazarus belonged, and of which he was apparently the ruler and head; as, also, how he was beloved by our Lord himself, and described by Him as His "friend," and raised by Him from the dead, we cannot believe him to have been a man who deserved death at the hands of the priests; especially if we add, as seems true, that though they "consulted" to put Lazarus to death, they could not discover any pseudo-legal means even by which to carry out their design. If such rulers could not so strain the law as to reach him, he must have been blameless indeed as to them.

It is also to be observed, that he himself had really done nothing whatever to arouse their resentment and ill-will. It was no fault of his (so to speak) that he had been raised from the dead. We can understand, if we cannot admire, the malignity of these men against Christ; and we know too well, because we see it so often, how some of the worst and most ungovernable descriptions of hatred are stirred up by the success of "the other side," especially in religion. Many arch-heretics and sceptics are not only opposed with vigour (which is right), on account of their errors, but with vindictiveness also (which is wrong), on account of their prowess. *Per contra*, many a teacher of truth is hated for the spirit and wisdom, as well as for the truth of his words. (Acts vi. 10, etc.) The hatred of the priests for our Lord was exactly of this kind. Being such as they were,

the brighter his innocence and goodness, and the more astonishing his wisdom and power, the more the depths of their malice would be stirred. It was hard to say, indeed, which they hated most, His doctrine or Himself. But what had Lazarus done to be visited by their hate? He had simply been acted on by the success of another; and had contributed in no degree whatever, by any volition of his own, to Christ's glory. He had not even responded, as was the case in some other Gospel miracles, to a miraculous word by his faith. He had been made to live again; that was all. Could he have helped himself if he would?

But this is understating the real truth. If they believed that he had been really raised from the dead (and, if not, why not disprove it, why seek to kill him at all?), there was not only no possible proper ground of offence to them in that fact, but it ought rather to have been in their eyes a treble protection and defence. It is something more than ordinary murder to slay a man who has risen from the dead. We know how atrocious a crime it is considered, in the very midst of the atrocities of warfare, to lay violent hands on the wounded. But here were men endeavouring to destroy one whom inexorable death had restored—men worse, therefore, than ordinary murderers, more unfeeling than “horrid war,” more exacting than death itself, twice as cruel as the grave. Such was their crime against humanity, as it were. At the root of it, as in all such cases, there lay a greater offence against God. There lay that which is the essence and sum of all sin (Gen. xxxix. 9; Psal. li. 4), the spirit of

rebellion against Him, and rebellion, too, of a peculiarly defiant and insolent kind. For they were not only breaking God's law, but they were actually fighting against His declared purpose ; and were seeking to undo, so far as lay in their power, that which they had reason to believe He had done. " Even supposing," so they said in effect, " that God has restored this man to life, we will destroy him again if we can. Be it so that there has been a miracle of mercy ; there shall be a miracle of wickedness to correspond."

II. The motive. The consideration of this will show us several further depths in this deep. It is one such depth, for example, to discover, that there was a very deliberate design in this matter ; and that it was no sudden, hasty, headlong dash into evil by some solitary and greatly tempted sinner, such as would afterwards astonish no one so much as himself. " The chief priests consulted." It was the plan of many men, therefore, not of one ; men of learning and station ; men of priestly station and dignity, sitting in priestly attire to consult. It was the result of deliberation, therefore, not of haste ; it was not an impulse, but a conspiracy ; something designed in cold blood, not in hot. Further yet, it was only a portion of a wider conspiracy still. " The chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus *also* to death." We have examined one chamber of wickedness ; that little word is like an unobserved door which suddenly opens, and reveals a second, larger still than the first. For it shows us that this murderous design was but an

addition, after all, a corollary to a much wider proposition, a mere appendix to a copious volume, a brief codicil to a will. The weapon to be employed on Lazarus was to fall first upon Christ. These were the full dimensions, the real motive, of the plot. First, the worker of the miracle, and then, for his sake, its subject; first, the rescuer, and then the rescued; the man that had overcome the grave, and the man that had come out of it—were both to be slain.

And what was expected by it all? The putting down one particular teacher of religion—the prevention of the spread of his doctrine. (Ver. 11.) This was their plan for suppressing what they were unable to confute. “This man doeth many miracles”—all men are being convinced by his words—all men are ready to believe in Him—we cannot answer Him, or deny His miracles; let us fall on Him with the sword. In other words, they had made up their minds, and it was the real object of all they designed, to kill the truth itself, if they could.

Consider, first, in conclusion, the extreme folly of their designs. As if it were ever possible to slay opinion with the sword! As though by means of death they could subdue One who had Himself subdued death just before! As though any physical force could prevail against truth! Perhaps it was the result of this design which taught Gamaliel better afterwards. (See Acts v. 38, 39.) Yet how slow men are in general to adopt his counsel, and how hard to be convinced of the fact that power and truth in reality are only different sides of one thing.

Consider, next, how this subject illustrates the ex-

ceeding hardness of man's heart. The declaration in Luke xvi. 31, that if men hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead, may sometimes appear a hard saying. It was experimentally verified in this case.

Lastly, observe the intrinsic wickedness of all persecution for faith's sake, and of all violence done to conscience, whether that of others or our own. It was out of this one evil root there grew the whole crime of our text. Never employ compulsion, therefore, about faith; never refuse to listen to evidence; never try to stifle inquiry; never "do evil that good may come." There is no extent of possible evil to which we may not come in this way! There is no depth of moral degradation to which we may not be brought eventually if once we begin this descent!

No. III.

THE INHERITANCE OF JOSHUA.

"They gave him the city which he asked."—*Josh. xix. 50.*

WE have the greatest of all Joshua's conquests described in this verse. ". . . . He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." Many and many a city—cities of prodigious strength and renown—had Joshua taken in his time; this little city which he received as a gift was more glorious to him than them all. We shall see this, I think, if we consider,—(1) His lofty position; (2) His advanced age; (3) His great services at this time; and if we take note of the nature of his conduct in regard to each of these points.

I. Joshua's position at this time was in every way great. Moses, his predecessor, had been "king in Jerurun;" he had been ruler and prophet and lawgiver; he had been chief of the State, and head of the Church in a sense; he had received commandments, appointed ceremonies, and ordained priests; he had rescued the people from Pharaoh, and divided the sea, and subdued the wilderness. For nearly half a century had he pre-

served and fed them there like a flock. His manner of doing so, moreover, had been a perpetual sign. Bread and water suitable for angels (Ps. lxxviii. 25) had been given all those years by his hand. Above all, he had been marvellously honoured to bear witness to the great coming Messiah, and to make ready the way for His advent both to His own people and to the world. Inso-much that when Christ Himself appeared, he took His stand on the platform which Moses had prepared. Such was the great man to whom Joshua had succeeded—to whom he had succeeded, and whom, in some respects, he surpassed. Thus, the spiritual authority of Moses, though rather as maintaining than originating, Joshua enjoyed too. (Josh. iv. 14; v. 2.) The civil authority, also, of Moses, Joshua exercised to the last. Neither were his miracles or his exploits any less. The giving of the manna, and the standing still of the sun; the passing a tideless estuary, and the division of swiftly rushing Jordan; the triumphant escape from Egypt, and the triumphant entry into Canaan, were very much on a par. So far Joshua was not less. But in some points he was greater. He was greater as having accomplished that which Moses was only permitted to predict. It was the culminating point of the one to behold the promised land from outside. The other "came, and saw, and conquered." And in this particular (more important still), he was a closer type of Christ, who gives us actual possession of that rest which the law only looks at afar off. And it is, no doubt, as being such, that he bears the same name, the Hebrew "Joshua" being

equivalent to the Greek "Jesus," who is the true and only Saviour not of the Jew alone but the Greek.

To this pre-eminent soldier-saint, then, an inheritance was assigned. This is the statement of our text. The point of it lies in the time. It was when they had "made an end"—after all below him had been provided for—when there was no other claim to attend to. (v. 49.) What admirable, what astonishing unselfishness! The highest in station, he was last in order. The greatest man amongst them by far—the first in authority, in religion, in prowess—he quietly waits till the last; being as much above them in disinterestedness as in everything else! Not even Caleb had acted thus.

II. But the next topic we have to consider will throw additional light on this point. Joshua was now an old man. There was no man except Caleb who was within twenty years of his age. If he was to have an inheritance, therefore, so as to enjoy it, he must have it almost at once. Every man in Israel but one could better afford to wait than himself. Now this is a kind of consideration which often presses much on the aged, and of which they do well to take heed. The young, with the hope of many days and opportunities before them, are often disposed to be lavish; whereas the old, who cannot have many, are tempted to be close and grasping. The less time, they think, the more haste. Prodigality the vice of the young, avarice the besetment of the old, has almost passed, in consequence, into a proverb. It is all the more, therefore, to be noticed and admired, how

completely this princely-hearted old saint was above any such taint. Not only is he content to wait till the last, but the portion he accepts is one which involves additional delay, it would seem. The particular "property," as we should say, that should come to him, appears to have been left to his choice ; and a splendid choice he had, too. When we consider all the cities he had captured, all the marches he had made, all the fields, estates, and provinces, which he had distributed, and his consequent intimate knowledge of the whole of the land ; and when we remember his own description of its glory many years before, we shall see that he really had (and knew that he had, as well) the best of the world at his feet. Nevertheless his choice falls on a city without note, a city, unlike those promised and given to others, apparently unprepared (Deut. vi. 10, 11), a city which had "to be built." There is as little selfishness in the nature as in the time of his choice. How leisurely, calm, and dignified is every step that he takes!

But we have not yet dwelt on the fact, that he does not take his inheritance, but ask it. This is all the more worthy of note when we consider—

III. The extent of his services to Israel in the past. It was Joshua who had conquered the enemies whom they had thought it impossible to withstand ; it was Joshua who had captured the cities which they had trembled to approach ; it was Joshua who, by his piety and example, had secured them that blessing from above which made their enemies weak and them strong.

Where would they have been, humanly speaking, except for him? When William of Normandy conquered this island, he considered the whole land to be his. Although the whole of Canaan belonged to Joshua by a much better right, yet he appropriated none to himself; he considered it his to divide, not to take. Although he had a right to any part, he claimed none; he distributed to others with authority, he requested for himself. May it not lead our thoughts to that greater Joshua, who, Himself the possessor and giver of all good, said to the Samaritan woman, as He sat by the well, Give me to drink? Or to the touching way in which that same Saviour bestows upon us pardon, and peace, and strength, and true life, all gifts conquered for us by His might (Ps. lxxviii. 18); and then asks for our hearts?

In conclusion, see, first, the great secret of Joshua's noble disinterestedness; he cared more for Israel than himself, because he cared most of all for religion. Possibly, his choice of a city in Mount Ephraim, and therefore near to Shiloh, the place of the tabernacle, shows this of itself. But, apart from this, we are sure from his piety that he felt as a stranger upon earth; and where this is indeed the case, it must always prevent any one from being avaricious and selfish. If a man is looking for heaven, he is longing for it; if his treasure is there, it is not here; it is not worth such a man's while, therefore, to be covetous; he can afford to wait—no man better. Oh, for more of this noble unselfishness, this heavenly-mindedness of true saints, this likeness to the true Joshua, this fitness for true rest!

But notice, last, its success. Joshua asked for nothing, till God commanded Israel to consult him (so I infer from our text); he left all in God's hands. What was the result? God accepted the trust; and rewarded it. This is exactly the way of the Lord. Extend help to others; He helps you in return. ". . . . Give; and it shall be given to you." Care for others—He cares for you. Trust Him for your salvation, and He saves you. Trust yourself, and you die. This is the great lesson which the second Joshua came to testify and to prove!

No. IV.

THE NIGHT OF PRAYER.

“ When it was day. . . . he chose twelve. ’—*Luke vi. 13.*

THE best position for thoroughly understanding a journey is at its termination. The speculation and ignorance of the start having passed into knowledge and experience by the close, the traveller can then look back, and obtain a proper conception of the whole. Let us act in this way by our text. “. . . When it was day.” Let us look back from that eastern day-break on the long night of prayer which it closed. (ver. 12). What are the lessons of that night? Out of its solemn darkness two lamps of truth seem to shine, teaching us (1) The special importance of private prayer; and (2) The special occasions which require it most.

I. THE GREAT IMPORTANCE OF PRIVATE PRAYER. Man is formed for society, and can no more prosper in perpetual solitude than a separated coral insect can build a coral reef by itself. This applies to religion: to associate with more advanced Christians is a privilege; with less advanced, is a duty. It is by the alternate reception and bestowment of sympathy and succour,

that the blood is circulated, as it were, in the mystical body of Christ, and so healthy life secured for all the members. Our Divine Master Himself fully recognised this great truth. On the one hand, He expected and accepted the ministrations and sympathy of others. (John iv. 7; Luke viii. 3; Matt. xxvi. 38, 40). On the other, He loved to be surrounded by those He could benefit and instruct; the sick, the young, the feeble-faithed, the slow of heart, the degraded, the lost. He came to seek and to save: this was His meat and His drink. Yet at times He withdraws from it all, even leaving his own disciples, or "constraining" them to depart. And the object is in order to give Himself unto prayer.

But if the Saviour needed society (more, however, for His work's sake than Himself), He also required rest. This was true of Him as a man. Like ourselves He could only labour at intervals. He remembered this necessity in the case of others. (Matt. xxvi. 41; Mark vi. 31.) He experienced it in Himself (John iv. 6; Matt. viii. 24):—that was something more than common weariness which lay fast fast asleep in a storm—on a tossing ship in a storm! Yet for the sake of private prayer, that overwrought and sacred frame of His is deprived by Him of its natural rest. The labours of the day are over; the night, the time for rest, has closed in; the disciples are distant: the world is asleep; He is watching unto prayer.

And so He continues during the whole of that night. All through the long hours of darkness His thoughts

are speaking within Him ; the " cold mountain and the midnight air " are hallowed by His voice ; and the rising sun discovers Him just rising from His knees. It would seem to follow, therefore, that private prayer is sometimes more important to man than his natural rest ; and that, whatever may be the ill effects of privation of proper sleep both to body and mind, want of secret devotion may be more hurtful to the soul. Better lose sleep, sometimes, than lose prayer.

All this, too, applies with the more force when we contrast our Lord with ourselves. Whatever was required on His part as to prayer, is far more required in our case. Indeed, the actual necessity for prayer in His case, is only to be perceived by an effort, by remembering that He had taken on Him both the form and the dependent position of a servant. Only, not being an " unprofitable servant," as we are, but one absolutely faultless in God's sight, He had no sins to confess, no forgiveness to entreat, no lost favour and holiness to regain, no salvation of his own to work out. Half the things, in short, which we have to pray for were His to bestow, not to ask. If it be a marvel, therefore, to see the Lord on His knees, much more is it an example, and, most of all, an admonition. Who can be dumb when Christ prays ? Who can pass a day without that which engaged Him a whole night, and for which He gave up for a time both His work and His rest ? Secret prayer, let us be assured, is the secret of true religion.

II. YET, LIKE OTHER ESSENTIAL DUTIES, IT HAS ITS

SPECIAL OCCASIONS AND FIT TIMES. Sometimes the word is "Go work;" sometimes, "Come and rest;" sometimes we are to be gathered for "common prayer;" sometimes separated for private. One special season for this last seems to be after controversy and contention: see the preceding context, where we find our Lord defending against the Pharisees the lawfulness of doing good on the Sabbath, and defending it, too, with such force as to fill His opponents with madness. This is the danger of controversy to the defeated side. The danger to the triumphant side is that of un-Christian elation and boasting; and, together with that, of confining one's thoughts exclusively to the particular truths in dispute, which are not always the most important. No sensible man, of course, would forbid all controversy on these grounds. It is essential sometimes to oppose error if we would not betray truth. But those who have to engage in this duty should be aware of its peculiar dangers; and should understand that they cannot discover and disarm them better than in the chamber of prayer. When men are mad against us, let us leave them, and pray for them in secret: we can do more good so than if remaining with them, both for them and the truth. On the other hand, when others applaud and urge us, let us leave them also, and endeavour to take secret counsel with the one infallible Judge. See how widely, and yet, at the same time, how distinctively this applies. Not only after controversy, but after public labours of all kinds, after teaching or hearing, after being much with men, good or bad, all such times are

special occasions for seeking to be alone with God. See how forcibly, too, this applies! If the Saviour, with His mysterious nature, and in all the might of His innocence, thus withdrew himself at times from the heat of the conflict, how imperative is the necessity in our case to be often away from the strife.

Thus much of the day preceding. The day following this night of prayer may also help to explain it; for decisions of pre-eminent importance had to be made on that day. The meek Founder of Christianity, now soon to depart, was about to select those who, after His departure, should undertake the greatest enterprise ever known. They were to go forth as "sheep among wolves," they were to face all the learning, power, hatred, and contempt of mankind, and, by gathering and creating an army in and out of the hostile camp of the world, were to attack that camp, and overcome it. Can we doubt that our Lord's prayers were by way of preparation for this choice? Can we fail, therefore, to see the lesson which they convey to ourselves? In natural swiftness and accuracy of perception He was doubtless the first of all men. Most probably, also, the prophetic spirit made this native brightness of judgment brighter still in his case. (John iii. 34.) Yet before He makes his decision, He spends a whole night in supplication. How irresistible the admonition to us! Let no man living presume to make up his mind without prayer—least of all, on points of importance to himself, to his faith, to his comfort, to his appointed work in the world. Secret prayer, we have said, is the secret of true religion; it is the secret, also, of success.

Take a brief caution, to conclude. After our Saviour had offered His prayer, He decided for Himself:—"He chose twelve." So it must be with us, as a rule. Whatever God may please to do in certain cases of dire perplexity, where our feeble powers are entirely at fault, it is not His ordinary custom to supersede our judgments, but to enlighten them. He guides our minds and consciences rather than our actions and limbs—which appears surely far more conducive both to his glory and our good. We only read of one occasion where He guided "wise men" by a "star." In short, we are to ask for wisdom, not for a miracle; we are to join together deliberation and prayer; we are to exercise our judgment as though we depended on it entirely; we are to seek for guidance as though we had no judgment to be employed. This appears inconsistent, of course, to the world. But it is only the apparent inconsistency of the meekness of true wisdom—even of Him, as we see here, whose very "foolishness" is wiser than man.

No. V.

THE DREAM OF PILATE'S WIFE.

"I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."—*Matt.* xxvii. 19.

ST. MATTHEW alone, of all the Evangelists, informs us of this dream; but the information he gives us is by no means of the most copious kind. Whether Pilate's wife, for example, was a Jewess, or a Roman idolatress, or a proselyte; whether she had ever heard of our Lord before this; what it was she beheld or heard in her sleep, and why it distressed her so much; are left untold by his pen. All he relates is this, that she had just dreamed a dream about Christ; that the dream had convinced her of His innocence; and that she had been so much disturbed by it at the time, and so much perplexed by it afterwards, that she had sent and entreated her husband not to consent to His death. Such are the facts of which the Evangelist wishes us to be informed. We shall do well, therefore, to give our attention to them, and to endeavour to inquire reverentially, (1) Why the dream in question was sent; (2) Why we are told that it was.

I. WHY THE DREAM IN QUESTION WAS SENT—for sent

it was beyond doubt. Amidst all the absurdities that have been uttered and believed about dreams, the following things seem quite clear—viz., that we cannot order our own dreams; that no other men can order them for us; that God sometimes does (or used to do, at the least); that no other beings ever have, or can, that we know of, except Him; and, consequently, that however uninterpretable and unimportant such things are in general, those which possess a special significance and bearing may be reasonably traced to God's hands. In the case of the present dream, moreover, the fact of its relation by the Evangelist is an additional argument on this side. And if so, then the vision, in reality, was a Divine preaching of Christ to the mind of the sleeper. And such it proved, in effect. It had the effect of concentrating her waking attention on Christ—on Christ in His innocence—on Christ in His death; that same marvellous combination which seems to have converted the penitent thief. Had she, therefore, thought of these things as that guilty sufferer did; had she followed up these first truths as she ought; had she inquired, and so heard, of the wonders accompanying His crucifixion, and of the truth and glory of His resurrection, who can exaggerate the result? Her dream might have ended in reality indeed—even in the eternal reality of heaven itself! At any rate, we may say of her dream, that it placed the key of heaven in her hands; something as was done for Cornelius by his own vision, and that of Peter, and something as was done for Saul by the vision of Ananias. This seems, therefore, to have been one

object (and a very precious and worthy object, compare John iv. 1—26) of this remarkable interposition, viz., to give to one perishing sinner an opportunity of being saved.

A second merciful object, I consider, was to warn another sinner of the extreme peril of his position at that particular time. Pilate, of himself, could know next to nothing, of course, of the unparalleled position he stood in. The Jewish populace, who had so long been taught to expect a Messiah, and who had so often been impressed by the words and works of the Saviour, might have known the true state of the case. Much more the Jewish doctors, who were unable either to deny his miracles or to dispute His doctrines. (Matt. xxii. 46; John xi. 47, 48.) But Pilate, a Roman governor, no very devout worshipper even of his own supposed gods, it is said, and only seeing the Saviour's work and character through the double veil of Roman contempt and of Jewish misrepresentation, how could he be aware of the tremendous issues which lay in his hands? Considering this, therefore, and considering also the sore temptation to which he was exposed of endeavouring to restore his lost popularity by condemning an utterly friendless, forsaken, and exceedingly unpopular prisoner, we shall see much to move our compassion for him, however greatly, in some respects, we may hold him to be blamed. Had we stood, indeed, by his side, and known what we know at present, should we not have felt almost bound to warn him of the excessive peril of his position? But this was the very purport of the dream and message of his wife.

May we not, then, consider that dream a final warning to him to beware? This would be quite in keeping with God's dealings. Judas had received such a warning from Christ, (Matt. xxvi. 24); and had conveyed one to the priests (xxvii. 3—5). So did Pilate himself afterwards to the Jews at large (xxvii. 24; see also Gen. xx. 3, Numb. xxii). And if so, how affecting an illustration it gives us of God's willingness to save all! (1 Tim. ii. 4; 2 Peter iii. 9, etc.)

II. WHY THE DREAM IS RELATED.—All the occurrences connected with the Crucifixion neither are nor could be related. (Comp. John xxi. 25.) Why is this made an exception? Partly, it is possible, as an illustration of God's power in mysteriously controlling even those innermost thoughts which are so uncontrollable by ourselves. Partly, too, as above, by way of illustration of God's mercy, and as opening out, by the cases of Pilate and Pilate's wife, an almost boundless prospect of the opportunities, strivings, and warnings vouchsafed to our race. If such things were given to them, and to Judas, and the chief priests, can we believe any one without them? But neither of these would appear to be the chief purpose of the history. The direct object of the narrative, that which accounts for its introduction into the very midst of the scenery of the Crucifixion, was of a different kind. Let me endeavour to explain.

Many false witnesses appeared against Christ; but their witness "not agreeing," not even in the most pretentious and plausible case (Mark xiv. 59), their testi-

mony was legally insufficient to establish any charge. The Law of Moses, as we know, was remarkably stringent on this point. (Deut. xix. 15.) And it was partly on this ground, it is thought, and partly because all extraneous testimony against the Saviour had virtually failed, that the High Priest at last adjured Him to declare who He was. That adjuration was, in fact, a tacit confession that their accusations were not proved. "What need we any further witnesses?" The truth is, they had really had none. The "prosecution" had "broken down."

In such a case, however, "not proven" is not enough; God would have the innocence of His Son beyond doubt. And inasmuch as His Son was "made under the law," He seems to have carefully abided in this respect by the regulations of the law. Two independent, consistent witnesses (as required), namely, the judge and the false disciple—the unscrupulous and unpopular judge who would lose nothing and gain much (as he supposed) by condemning, and the suspicious yet intimate companion who would certainly have detected evil if there had been any to detect—combined, without intending it, in establishing this great truth. But in a case such as this, virtually tried in the presence of the universe, greater testimony still than that of man is required. This we have, therefore, in prophecy (Isaiah liii. 9, etc.); in the subsequent inspired declarations of Apostles (1 Peter ii. 22, etc.); in voices from heaven during life (Matt. iii. 17, etc.); and now, at last, just previous to death, in this mysterious dream. A message from the unseen world, conveyed in

such language as the hearer would exactly appreciate and understand, comes to this Roman governor, immediately on his taking his seat as the representative of the Emperor of the World. Thus strikingly, thus almost dramatically, at the very crisis of the Saviour's fate, is He declared without sin !

The whole subject is a signal evidence of the importance attached to the Atonement. The perfect innocence of the Saviour is an essential feature in that doctrine. See, therefore, how carefully, how profoundly, how anxiously, and, so to speak, how reconditely the point is established. Voices from friends and enemies both, voices from the past and present alike, voices from heaven, voices from earth, and even voices from hell itself (Mark i. 24, etc.), all attest it to our faith. It is so with all the doctrine of Christ's death. When the foundation stone of an edifice is laid, it is with much solemnity and precision ; special words and forms are employed ; and multitudes are gathered to look on. In the numerous, varied, copious, careful, and almost exhaustive accounts of the great Crucifixion, we see much the same thing. Of no other event, not even of Christ's birth or resurrection, have we so many, so minutely detailed, such manifestly "state" accounts as we have of His death. The reason is as above ; the foundation-stone was being laid. This may help us to understand and admire the Apostle's well-known resolve, "to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." And this may help us, let us hope and pray, to make the same resolve for ourselves !

No. VI.

THE POISONED POTTAGE.

"O thou man of God, there is death in the pot."—2 *Kings* iv. 40.

It is a mistake to suppose that a miracle is always an extraordinary exercise of God's power. It is always an unusual manifestation of it; but that is not the same thing. When the Almighty, accordingly, would impress Job with a sense of His power, it is not to any of his miraculous, but to some of His ordinary works He appeals (Job xxxviii—xli). So the Psalmist (Psa. xix. 1—6), and the apostle (Heb. i. 3), in illustrating the same subject, refer to the most common of daily phenomena, and to the ordinary course of God's rule. A miracle, therefore, is to a theological student what an eclipse or a transit is to an astronomical observer. The motions of the heavenly bodies are not necessarily any greater when in conjunction than when apart—they may sometimes be even less—but they are much more open to observation, and so much more easy to compute. In the same way, the exercise of God's power in a miracle is not necessarily any more energetic than in His ordinary operations; but it is much more mani-

fest to the perception of man, and so, much more easy to understand.

It follows, consequently, that the use of a miracle, like that of an eclipse, is twofold. It may be studied as a special phenomenon in itself; or it may be regarded as specially serving to illustrate the general mechanism of the heavens. There is a certain one-eyed way of thinking which regards a miracle as only a *wonder*. There is another way, just as one-eyed, which regards it as only a *revelation*. The true way, the "binocular view," includes both: as we trust to be able to shew of the miracle of our text.

I. THE MIRACLE IN ITSELF. It was remarkably well-timed. If ever "the times were out of joint," it was at that season in Israel. The son of Ahab, foolishly following in his father's footsteps, was then king; Ahab himself had only lately died; and Jezebel was still alive. It was "a day of trouble, of rebuke, and blasphemy." All the wealth and influence of the court had long been against the true faith, and in favour of ungodliness and superstition. Many prophets, in consequence, had been slain; many had been concealed to save life; and it seemed at one time to the most eminent of them all, that he was the only God-fearing man left in the land. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" The fitting answer came in miracles such as this. And such, you will find, is the economy of the miracles of Scripture; they come exactly at the time, of the character, and in the proportion required. The miracles in Egypt in

opposition to the magicians, the "special miracles" of Acts xix. amongst the magical arts of the Ephesians, the abundant miracles of our Saviour's own ministry, and these signal miracles of Elijah and Elisha, are all cases in point. Indeed, the old heathen dramatic rule, that a god should not be introduced unless at a crisis befitting his interposition, might have been taken from this practical rule of God's word. We only read in Scripture of the miraculous lamp where miraculous light is required.

But this miraculous illumination is not all. The scriptural miracles, in accomplishing this, their chief purpose, accomplish other minor purposes, too. It is so with that of our text. It was not only a public benefit and encouragement to all true Israelites at that time; but it was also a private providential deliverance to one important company among them. It was not a mere display, therefore, of God's power. On the contrary, it established faith by its manner of preserving life; and in seeking, as it did, to confirm grace, it employed the hand of Providence for that end: which is precisely according to the injunction of our Lord Himself. (Luke ix. 1, 2.)

Further, we may observe that the miracle was of a singularly discriminating description. It gave assistance to God's servants; to God's special servants the prophets; to God's prophets attending to their vocation ("sitting before Elisha," it is said); to God's prophets engaged in this way when the severe pressure of their daily necessities (there was a dearth in the land," see

also verses 42, 43), must have been a great temptation to them to give their sole and undivided attention to merely temporal matters. How peculiarly calculated, therefore, was this assistance to benefit all believing tremblers in Israel at that time! What is good for the minister is good for his flock; what encourages him in his work encourages multitudes beside him.

Lastly, it gave all this encouragement and comfort, because it was a real miracle, a true sign. No ordinary man could have cured the poisoned pottage by a handful of mere meal. The efficacy was not in the means, but in something behind them, as it were. So, in the healing of the brackish waters by salt (2 Kings ii.), in the cure of Naaman by the waters of Jordan (2 Kings v.), in the restoration of sight by the use of clay and of the fountain of Siloam (John ix.), the means selected, considered only in themselves, were visibly inadequate to the end. May we not add, were purposely inadequate, too; in order that the fact of that their superhuman employment might be all the more plain. "The treasure" was "in an earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power might be of God, and not of men."

But let us regard the miracle—

II. AS ILLUSTRATIVE OF GOD'S WAYS, WHETHER IN PROVIDENCE OR IN GRACE. Our last remark has been in some respects anticipative of this thought. As by the handful of meal in this history, so by the "foolishness of preaching," by the doctrine of the cross, by "babes and sucklings," by the carnally weak and ignoble, by earthen vessels of various descriptions, God is pleased to

work, as a rule. It is one of his most distinguishing prerogatives to effect great results by small means. The caterpillar, the locust, the palmer-worm, such are the armies He employs. Never let the humble believer despond, therefore, because of the apparent inadequacy of the means. It is a principle with God that His "strength should be made perfect in weakness."

The history also serves to illustrate the admirable timeliness of God's help; and that not alone with regard to the general character of the times, as already observed. It was not when the gourd was gathered, not when it was shred into the vessel, not till it was on the very point of being partaken of, that God interfered. It was the same as to the offering of Isaac, as to the raising of Lazarus, as to the sending of Christ Himself in the "fulness of times," and as to many a personal blessing vouchsafed to his saints. The sense of peace, the apprehension of important truth, the greatly-needed temporal mercy, the much desired spiritual deliverance, often arrive when the very next step would be into absolute ruin or death. Exactly "sufficient for the day" is both its evil and its good.

Besides the timeliness of God's care, we see also its discrimination—a head of illustration which follows from a point touched on above. And we also see, in a very remarkable manner, the completeness of God's care. We see that He not only provides for our necessities; He corrects our mistakes. Even the poisoned gourd is made by Him to minister to man's life. Even the follies, the mistakes, the wanderings, and, in a cer-

tain sense, the very falls of those who truly believe in His Son and love Him, are made to help them on their way. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Not that this, however, applies altogether to the man who knowingly selects poison as his food.

Once more, we see illustrated here the great reflex benefits of the Gospel. Elisha came as a guest. He became the true host. They gave him their best, full of death. He gave them life in return. Something the same was true of Zaccheus, of the widow of Zarephath, and of the two disciples who went to Emmaus; nor does the principle fail of any one who really receives Christ in his heart. "I will come in to him, and sup with him, AND HE WITH ME." (Rev. iii. 20.)

No. VII.

THE SCRIPTURAL SCALE OF RESTITUTION.

"I restore him four-fold."—*Luke* xix. 8.

THE repentance of Zaccheus was satisfactory, both in kind and degree. "This day is salvation come to this house." Here is a true "Son of Abraham," a true successor and inheritor of Abraham's faith. Such was our Lord's testimony to the sufficiency of the evidence of his faith—of which evidence we may consider that we have one chief portion in our text. This solemn, public, and practically irrevocable pledge, was one principal result, and one convincing proof, therefore, of the saving nature of His faith. Let us endeavour, therefore, to ascertain—I. ITS FULL SIGNIFICANCE; AND II. ITS SECRET PRINCIPLE.

I. THE FULL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLEDGE.—It was equivalent to a public confession of his sin, which, being a notorious and public offence, required an acknowledgment of the kind. There is no uncertainty in the Greek, (see Alford, *in loc.*); it is not so much "if ever" as "when ever" I have so done. There is a plain acknowledgment, therefore, of the fact, which

is something. There is an acknowledgment, also, of the sin, which is more. This will appear by comparing his language with that injunction in the law of Moses, (Exod. xxii. 1), respecting the man who should steal an ox or a sheep, that he should restore five oxen for the ox, and four sheep for the sheep.* This injunction, which appears to have been remembered afterwards by David (2 Sam. xii. 5, 6), seems to be referred to here by Zaccheus; and was sure to be in the recollection of the learned Pharisees who were present. The statement of Zaccheus, therefore, amounted to saying, and to saying in their hearing (most humiliating of all), "I confess myself as bad as a thief: the penalty which the law exacts from such an one, I inflict on myself."

But this injunction of Moses does not stand alone; there being a remarkable variety and gradation of enactments on this point. For example, comparing the passage above, Exod xxii. 1, with the same chapter, (ver. 4), we find that if the robber did not go so far as to kill or sell the animal stolen, a difference was to be made. In that case he was to restore double, not fourfold; to add the value of one sheep, not of three. Again, from Levit. vi. 1—5, we find, that if a man betrayed a trust, or obtained any advantage by fraud or deceit, or retained lost property found by him without making inquiry, he was considered, rightly enough, as being guilty of theft. But if we accept that interpre-

* The proportion for the ox was probably greater, it being an animal valuable for labour as well as for food.

tation of the beginning of verse 4, which supposes such a culprit to become conscious of his guilt and to confess it (and it is difficult to see otherwise how such often secret crime could be known), we find that a yet further mitigation of penalty was to be made on that express ground. "It shall come to pass, *because*, etc. . . . he shall restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto." So that three distinct gradations of crime, and of corresponding punishment, appear to be marked. (1) Where the thief was truly contrite, and made confession, there the rate of addition required was twenty per cent. (2) Where there was only sufficient compunction to prevent his treating the stolen property as altogether his own, there the rate of addition was increased to one hundred per cent. (3) Where there was least compunction, and most injury, and greatest persistency, there the required rate of addition amounted to three hundred per cent. And yet this was the case with which Zaccheus tacitly compares himself here. It is this most inexcusable guilt, this most grievous censure, this heaviest penalty, which he connects with himself; and it is by this accordingly, above all, that he proves the godly sincerity of his sorrow: it being a criterion of such heaven-born grief, that it never denies or excuses, but, if anything, exaggerates sin—as David, *Psa. xxv. 11*; and Paul, *1 Tim. i. 15*; and Job, at last, *Job xlii. 5, 6*.

II. THE PRINCIPLE INVOLVED—for there is a principle involved in this kind of self-judgment; and godly

sorrow, is, after all, and notwithstanding the preceding mention of exaggeration, somewhere about right on this point. I am not referring only to the principle, that, if we have wittingly caused injury to our neighbour, we are bound to make it good if we can. Even that useful, but unavoidably clumsy code of moral rectitude, the common law of the realm, can enforce a principle such as that. Justice is blind, we say, as being impartial. Mere Act of Parliament justice is blind in another sense, too. It cannot perceive or distinguish, and it is obliged in consequence to ignore, many an ethical principle which even a sense of true honour can discern. But the broad principle, not to say the coarse one, that if you have caused pecuniary loss to your neighbour, you are bound to repay it; this can be recognized and acted on, even by the law of the land. Those miserable actions for "loss of a daughter's services," are an illustration of this point.

But the laws of heaven, I need hardly remark, are not limited in this way. They teach us that we are bound to compensate, not only for the loss, but for the wrong. Those things which our poor human enactments, never rising quite so high as their source in the average conscience of the nation, are obliged to ignore—the injury done to a man's feelings, the anxiety, the degradation, the anguish, the losses not calculable by commerce, but so often incalculable in importance to the sufferer—all these are computed in the heavenly balances in the strictest possible way. *And a God-quicken'd conscience will endeavour to*

judge its own doings in a similar manner. 'Love,' it will say with the apostle, 'is the fulfilling of the law ;' in so far, therefore, as I have failed of real love, I have failed of the right ; that is the deficiency which appears against me ; that is the void which I have to fill up. Fourfold the bare loss is no extravagant computation !"

How, difficult, therefore, to make real restitution for our offences against man ! Some have calculated (curiously, if not altogether wisely), how easily this pledge of Zaccheus might have made him a pauper. Would the loss have been overwhelming, even so ? Is it not better to have nothing of our own, than to appropriate anything of our neighbour's. But whatever the case about him, it is certainly true that his principle would make beggars indeed of some men. Did you ever drive a cruel bargain—or take advantage of your brother's ignorance, or amiability, or distress—in order to put a few pounds in your pocket ? You owe him four times as much in return. Did you ever speak with unnecessary severity ? You must employ four times as much of the oil of kindness to put things as they were. So, if you have ever tempted any one, or spoken corruptingly, or set a bad example, or "been angry without a cause," or "passed by on the other side," four hundred per cent. of the opposite good is the amount of your debt. Never say, therefore, as some do, that you have paid every one his own in this world. It is a distinguishing mark of God's grace if you sincerely resolve to attempt it.

But how then about God ? About making restitution

to Him, where the debt is deeper by far, and the power as much less? Our duty to God is what we owe Him. But what do we *not* owe to God? Do we not owe to Him all we have, and are, and hope for—all we can do, or become, or obtain? He who gives all has a right to all in return; and that all the more because of the truth, that He gives us all “richly to enjoy.” “Thou shalt love the Lord with all thy might” for all eternity, is not a particle beyond right. The debt is inexhaustible, therefore, to begin; and yet it is added to, if not even doubled, by every separate sin. Who shall make restitution then unto God? If fourfold is not too much towards man, what is due towards Him? And how shall that which is due be discharged? These are the questions which a spiritual nature inquires of itself; this is the great demand which a regenerated conscience makes on itself. You see in Zaccheus its intense desire to be just towards man. There is at least as intense a desire to be just towards God; and all that can rightly be said of the Fatherhood and love of God does not satisfy this desire. It rather intensifies it, in one way. The greater God’s kindness, the greater my sin. There may be some difficulty, therefore, as alleged by some men, in understanding exactly how the blood of Christ can satisfy that desire, and “purge the conscience from dead works,” (Heb. ix. 14); but one point seems indisputable:—viz. that nothing else ever can!

VIII.

THE BORROWED COLT.

"The Lord hath need of him."—*Luke* xix. 31.

THERE cannot be much doubt that this expression, "the Lord" refers to Christ Himself. How far this was understood by the owners of the colt, is, to say the least, extremely uncertain. It is doubtful, indeed, whether the two disciples themselves, though well aware in whose name they were speaking, were equally well informed as to the Lord's real pretensions and nature. To us, who look down on the history from the present height of the Church, and who have been taught by these disciples and their followers all that they afterwards learned about Christ, the words have a significance even deeper than they probably appeared to have at the time. They are all the more worthy, therefore, of our prayerful thought. Let us consider them as involving, I. An affecting acknowledgment; and, II. An irresistible plea.

I. AN AFFECTING ACKNOWLEDGMENT. Our Saviour, in assuming our nature, assumed our condition as well; He became dependent; He became needy. Various indications of this are found in the records of His life.

As an infant, like other infants, He was dependent on a mother's affection and care, and required a place of rest for His infantile limbs. As a child, we are morally certain that He was not fed and sustained by miracles, but by ordinary parental forethought and exertion. As a man, we believe that, before commencing His ministry, He depended on His own labour for His bread; and afterwards we know that He depended on the ministrations of others. We know, also, from the temptation in the wilderness, that this was a dependence in reality, not in name; and that He was no more permanently above the necessity of daily bread than any of ourselves. And, not to dwell on all that is implied in the mention of His thirsting, sleeping, being weary, and so on, we see by His desire for companionship when in sorrow (Matt. xxvi. 40), by His touching reproach to Judas (Luke xxii. 48), and by His grief over the hardness of men's hearts (Mark iii. 5), how much He stood in need, in a sense, of human sympathy and kindness.

No proud, independent, solitary manner of life, therefore, was His amongst men. On the contrary, in the very same manner as ourselves, and sometimes to the very same extent, though never from exactly the same cause—He habitually depended upon help. How far He received it from man is a different thing.

Now our text is especially valuable as an open acknowledgment of this truth. The nebulous light of other passages is concentrated here as a star. "The

Lord hath need." So the Lord Himself said; so the disciples were taught to repeat; so evangelists, to record. Let us observe, with deep admiration, all the humiliation it reveals! How extreme the state of poverty which had to ask such a loan! Some few of the Saviour's personal friends, it is true, had much wealth and more love; and would have done almost anything for His sake. He was rich, therefore, in the riches of His friends; and very uncommon wealth this is, too, in more senses than one. It is also true, of course, if you go into the question of desert, and if you consider a man wealthy in proportion to the obligations he has laid on his friends or his country by his good deeds, that there never was a man of more wealth than the Prophet of Nazareth. At the same time, in Himself as a man, in regard to the legal possession of property, and in regard to such exclusive command of resources as the law could enforce, there never was a poorer man in the world. After He ceased to live by labour, He lived on charity till His death.

Such was the rule He had laid down for Himself. Other men assume vows of poverty; it pleased Him to observe them. And this, moreover—as every other drop in His cup of sorrow, every other thread in His garment of shame—for us men, and for our sakes. The "Lord had need" of the colt, because He had work to do with it on our behalf. This true Melchizedek, this King of Righteousness, was content, as a general rule, to pass unrecognised through the world. But He would not allow it to be supposed (deceitfully) that

He had no claims as a King. We find, accordingly, that He addressed the people "as one having authority" (Matt. vii. 29), that He acknowledged His kingship to Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 11), and asserted it to the disciples (John xiii. 13). So, on this occasion, in the presence of all, He who had formerly thrust a crown away from Him, now makes a public entry after the manner of a king; and not only so, but justifies the children who salute Him as such; and then proceeds, after the manner of a sovereign, to visitatorial acts. How distinct, therefore, and yet, at the same time, how characteristically modest, is the manner of His claim. The claim, it would seem, must be made as one part of His appointed mission; but how still and quiet the voice in which it is made. It is the ancient prophecy to the letter. (Zech. ix. 9.) And it is an additional touch to the picture, a still deeper note in this subdued but beautiful harmony, that the animal which the Saviour rode on was but a borrowed one after all! Could anything better become Him who is the King of men's hearts?

II. THE IRRESISTIBLE PLEA involved in our text follows naturally from these thoughts. If the owners had refused to lend the animal, we cannot suppose for a moment that the Saviour's design would have failed. There were hundreds of other owners, multitudes of other animals, myriads of other methods, which the Lord Jesus might have used. Such a refusal, therefore, would have been the owner's loss, and not His. But the truth is, they do not appear to have hesitated for a

moment. Whatever the probable scantiness of their knowledge, they knew quite enough to decide them. If they knew nothing more than this, that He who was spoken of as "the Lord," had a real right to that name, and that He really required their property for His use, did not this consideration of itself preclude the possibility of reply? Who can refuse anything when it is the Lord who requests? Whatever it be that the Master asks for, He can but ask for His own.

This, to them; to us, with our superior knowledge, there is still superior cogency in the plea. It pleases our gracious Saviour to act on this principle still. He is perpetually asking His people to assist in His work; and He is perpetually asking them on this ground, that He "has need" of their help. Not, of course (as before), that He so requires it as to be unable to do without it. No man, it is said, is indispensable to society: whatever his qualifications and position, there is a kind of anastomosing property in the community which effectually prevents this. This is indisputably true of that society of which Christ is the head. No member of it, no member's services, or gifts, or labours, or talents, are essential to Him or to it. Yet He sees fit to employ them—and that not of constraint, but willingly; not by command, but request; even as though we did Him a favour by consenting to be employed. Surely this is an irresistible way of putting what should be irresistible enough in itself.

This subject is susceptible of a great variety of applications. It applies, *e.g.*, to our gifts. Those

labours of love which God puts into Christian hearts to devise, He asks Christian liberality to support. He preaches the Gospel, not by angels, but by men; He does not supersede, but sanctify, human gifts and attainments; He feeds His ministers, and conveys His missionaries, and spreads His word, not by miracles, but by money—or rather by that of which money is only the representative and result. When we are asked, therefore, to aid in such purposes by our gifts, let us ever remember the true Author, and the real ground, of the request. It is Christ Himself who condescends to borrow them from our hands:—I say to “borrow” advisedly.

The same, again, is true of our worldly labours. We have need of them, most of us, for ourselves; so have our families; and our friends. So, also, has Christ Himself; or He would not request them from us. This may greatly help to sweeten and sanctify the daily drudgery of existence, and to make it a daily sacrifice to His praise. In the same ways of temporal losses and disappointments; what we lose (or rather seem to lose), He has gained. So of every bodily infirmity and trial; Christ, in some way, has need of it; and, if we submit to it willingly on this ground, it becomes a burnt-offering to His glory. And so, finally, of those bitterest of sacrifices, those which bereave us of our friends. “The Lord had need” of them. “The Master is come, and calleth for thee.” Who can refuse, who can linger, who can repine, in that case?

IX.

THE DEATH OF SENNACHERIB.

"As he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, his sons smote him with the sword."—2 *Kings* xix. 37.

WHY are we told of this fact? Holy Scripture, as a general rule, passes over the lives and deaths and exploits of the mere great men of the world in a most cursory way. Only one incident, for example, is mentioned in the life of Herod the Great, (compare this with Josephus); nothing is told us of the Roman Emperor Augustus except his office and name; and not so much even as that of his successor Tiberius. How is it then that we are informed so particularly of the death of this king? Why is there so marked a digression from the usual path of God's word? The answer will be found, I believe, by a reference to the preceding history. If we consider, I., The character of Sennacherib's life, and compare with that, II., The character of his death, we shall discover both the reason and the instruction of the text.

I. THE CHARACTER OF HIS LIFE. Two things had distinguished it towards man—excessive violence and much pride. You have seen pictures from those

ancient Assyrian palaces which have been brought to light again of late years. A favourite subject in many is the victorious king, commanding his captives to be slain; or perhaps himself blinding them with his spear. These pictures, we may be quite certain, are only too correct; the artist portrayed these things with such vigour because they had frequently been in his sight. That almost brutal bodily strength, those stiff and barbarous adornments, those merciless and unrelenting features, were observable, in that ferocious dynasty, to the life. And this King Sennacherib, perhaps, of all these sovereigns, was the most successful, and so, the worst. Probably, therefore, it is his portrait which you see most frequently on those slabs. And, at any rate, they help to furnish us with a true idea of his life. Take a succession of those revolting transactions, those causeless conflicts, those captured cities, those butchered prisoners, those blinded sovereigns, those streaming executions, and you have the deeds of his reign. Take, next, the triumphant pride with which he exults over them, and you have the full criminality of those deeds. "Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivah?" (Ver. 13.) Thus it is he enumerates and boasts of the atrocities represented on those walls!

The tide of his oppression came at last to the land of Judea—especially dangerous ground. For here he came in contact with a "peculiar people," even the *inheritance* of Jehovah, the family which God was

educating for the benefit of mankind. This added both to the enormity and to the importance of the crime. How to the enormity, if he did not know what he was doing? Because he knew sufficient to know more. Where ignorance is wilful or careless, it does not excuse our sins, it aggravates them; it *must* lead to many sins; it *may* lead to any sin; it is responsible, therefore, for them all. "We did not know whom it was we were neglecting:" such will be the defence of some at the last. (Matt. xxv. 44.) The reply is the same as above—they knew sufficient to know more. So, in this case, Sennacherib was well aware that he was fighting not against Hezekiah, but Jehovah. Notwithstanding all he had done against the gods of the nations, he knew how great was the trust of Hezekiah and his people in the Lord. (Isa. xxxvi. 15, 18.) This ought to have led him to inquire. Instead of this, he says in effect, "Be the Lord Jehovah who he may, I am not to be checked." Before any man went to so awful a length, he ought to have fully known what he said.

We must also consider the effect of his language and conduct on the Jews. How did his sin appear in their eyes? Considering their position and destiny, this was of importance to the world. And, in their eyes, it is clear, that his offence involved the most direct and daring challenge to all they adored. That Assyrian flood had submerged all the neighbouring tribes; all the gods of the heathen, and not only so, but even all the minor mountains of Emmanuel's land, had been

successively overwhelmed. Only the mountain of the Lord's House remained above it. And now that same flood with its many waves threatened to engulf even that. Would the House be overthrown, or the waves be driven back? Would this great conqueror conquer Jehovah, or would he, instead, and at last, himself be subdued? "He hath sent to reproach the living God." (Isa. xxxvii. 4.) All the faith of Judah stood by, and all the unborn faith of Christianity stood behind it, to observe the result.

II. THE CHARACTER OF SENNACHERIB'S DEATH. Having seen the nature of his challenge, we have now to notice how it was taken up. God replied, first, to his pride. "Who can stand," the king had said, "before me?" God answered this wicked boast, not in battle, not by spoken rebuke, but, as it was prophesied, by a "blast." In the dead of night, when all Jerusalem was asleep or praying, a messenger of God passed in silence through the distant Assyrian camp. No one beheld his approach, or heard his step, or observed his departure. He came in, he passed through, he was gone, like a breath. But the breath of nearly two hundred thousand sleeping warriors was gone with him, too. In the morning the once mighty sovereign is in a camp of dead men. Where is the terrible army which he had previously relied on? What has he now left to be proud of? What can he do now, except return home, humiliated and alone?

God replied, next, to his violence and bloodshed.

“ With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matt. vii. 2; see also Judges i. 7; 1 Sam. xv. 33; Matt. xxvi. 52.) The same kind of rule seems to have been observable in this case. After the king had returned to his own kingdom and city, the weapon which he had so often employed on others was employed on himself. As the prophet had foretold, he died by the “sword.” Besides which, it is to be noted, that this man of unnatural cruelty, with a horrible kind of fitness, died by unnatural hands. He was slain by his sons—by two of them, who, brothers in hatred and cruelty, and worthy inheritors of his nature, consented together in this deed, and so doubled the guilt upon each. How often we see this! The instruments of the sinner’s punishment brought into being by himself!

Lastly, Jehovah answered the man’s blasphemy and profaneness. The challenge had been delivered, if not within hearing, certainly within sight, of God’s House, in the ears and language of the people who sat on the wall. No answer came at the time. God, who sometimes waits to be gracious, often delays to destroy. But the answer, when it did come, was most conclusive and direct. In the king’s own kingdom and city, in the temple of his own idol, while engaged in the very act of worship, the blow descended upon him. If safe anywhere, he thought, it was there; but there it was, on the contrary, just there, that he died. Where he hoped for protection, there he was slain.

"Where is the God" he had boasted, "who can deliver from me?" "Can thine own god protect thyself?" replied the silent stroke of God's hand.

It is unnecessary to point out the importance of such a lesson to the Jews. So significant an incident was well worthy of being commemorated among them. Like those separated portions of English counties which you see on the map in the midst of other counties, this was an important portion, though a detached one, of the life-history of God's people. How it would encourage their faith in His help, and so prepare them for the coming captivity, and bring home to them the momentous truths of Psa. xxi. 8; Psa. lviii. 11, etc. And, if the story was all this to them, not less of course, is it to us, who are taught by their experience, and are the inheritors of their faith. "Evil shall hunt the wicked to overthrow him." We see (just as much as they did) the conclusion of such a "hunt" in our text—we see how God and the impenitent sinner must come face to face at the last—how such a man prepares his own torments, and creates his own executioners, and sends up against heaven the very bolts which come down again perforce on himself. These are truths much forgotten, and, therefore, to be often insisted on, in these days. There is a way of preaching the Saviour as though there was nothing from which to be saved. This grand Old Testament history, rising up out of those distant Assyrian ruins, may help to deliver us from

such a delusion. Doubtless there is a Saviour; but there is a need for Him, too; there is such an awful reality as "the wrath to come." Doubtless there is a "City of Refuge; but that is not all. The "avenger of blood" is behind us; and if we do not flee to it, we are lost.

X.

THE UNBELIEF OF CHRIST'S BRETHREN.

"Neither did His brethren believe in Him."—*John* vii. 5.

Who were these "brethren" of the Lord? Were they, according to the most obvious and natural interpretation of the expression, other children of his mother Mary by Joseph her husband; or were they, according to an interpretation which the usage of Scripture cannot be said to forbid, only His near relatives or kinsmen? It is a point on which absolute demonstration either way seems to be entirely out of our power. If so, it appears to follow, inevitably, that the question is not one of any practical importance, unless it be as an indirect proof (amongst many others) of how little we have to do, in the matter of salvation, with any one except Christ. No question affecting Christ Himself, as this question affects His own mother, is thus left in the dark.

In all this cloudiness, however, there is a streak of blue sky. These "brethren" of the Lord were undoubtedly His nearest male relatives among men. All are *agreed upon* this. Their unbelief, therefore, in Him

and His mission is a highly significant fact; and may be profitably employed to illustrate two remarkable truths—viz., that our blessed Lord, in working out our redemption, owed next to nothing to man's sympathy, and nothing at all to man's help. We purpose to make these two truths the two divisions of our subject.

I. HE OWED NEXT TO NOTHING TO MAN'S SYMPATHY. A man's own relations, of all men, being his own flesh and blood in a pre-eminent sense, are those who ought to sympathize with him. To feel for him is only a single step beyond feeling for themselves. The condition, indeed, of our relatives, whether good or bad, is like the condition of our garments; and men judge us to a certain extent, whether rightly or wrongly, by that test. They respect a man with respectable relatives something as they respect one who wears a good coat; and not altogether without warrant in either case. Besides which, we are all practically the richer or poorer, as a rule, according as we have rich relatives or poor ones. Even a wise selfishness, therefore, should induce us to sympathise with our kin, let alone the unselfish influence of natural love. And this is felt and acted on by mankind. We are troubled by the troubles of our kinsfolk in a peculiar manner and degree; and we do that for the inner circle of our relatives which we should never think of doing for the circle beyond them. Not but that this outer circle also is benefited in this way; for family affection cements together not

the family only, but the state; and gives a kind of family solidity and coherence to the whole.

But this common privilege of humanity was denied to our Lord; and that, without fault of His own. His own nearest relatives did not believe in Him, or respect Him. From the preceding verses we discover, that they were aware, to a certain extent, of His pretensions, and that they had heard of His miraculous doings, and also of those who believed in Him as His disciples: but all they do themselves is to dare Him to go to Judæa. “*If thou do these things, show thyself to the world.*” (Ver. 4.) A bitter enemy might have spoken as His kinsfold did in this case. In fact the Pharisees, in Matt. xvi. 1, who, “tempting desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven;” the chief priests, in Matt. xxvii. 41—43, who “mocked Him, saying, He saved others, Himself He cannot save;” and the Roman soldiers, in Matt. xxvii. 29, who, “bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, king of the Jews,” did not show greater want of sympathy, though their cruelty was more gross. In all cases He was treated as one who had His claims to make good.

At the same time we are by no means to condemn our Lord's brethren as though destitute of natural affection. They were rather perplexed than estranged; and their words were to some extent against Him because their feelings were not with Him. It was much the same on that other occasion, when these *same* brethren came with His mother, and said, “He is

mad." They were so far from sharing His feelings, which is what sympathy consists in, that they could not even comprehend them. So great was the chasm, in this respect, between those nearest Him and Himself. He moved alone amongst men. There was one world of feeling around Him. There was another world of feeling within Him. Much went out from the one; how much—or, rather, how little—came in from the other!

II. HE OWED NOTHING TO MAN'S HELP. The rare instances in which He did receive a little sympathy will be sufficient to show this. Take the well-known confession of Simon Peter (Matt. xvi. 16) as one example of this truth. Having enquired the opinion of the world, probably by way of showing us how little it understood Him, the Lord turns next to His Church: "Whom say ye that I am?" For once there is a throb of sympathy from another heart to His own—from the outer feeling to that within. And is there not a marked appreciation of it in the instant fervour of Christ's reply: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona," etc. Like cold water on a thirsting tongue, so it fell on His heart. Like water spilt on the ground, so the next moment it was gone. This is evidenced by the fact, that when the Saviour proceeded next to those topics which we know to be the especial characteristics of His Messiahship, and the very heart and core of the Gospel, Peter was utterly at a loss, and instead of the

language of sympathy, ventured on that of rebuke. Hence the sharpness of the reply of the Lord, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou art an offence unto me"—literally, a stumbling block, a scandal, an impediment. Not only, therefore, was there no help, there was the very opposite of help—there was hindrance; and that to a degree which was worthy of being connected with the great adversary himself.

Another illustration is furnished us in the memorable scene of Gethsemane. The disciples on that occasion so far sympathized with their Master as to catch the infection of His grief; but their sorrow compared with His, was like the effects of a violent tempest on a little rock-pool and on the spreading ocean. Their sorrow could sleep—His could not. They were unable to watch—He could do nothing else. Their agitation scarcely disturbed themselves—His reached up to heaven itself, and brought an angel down to His help; which is an evidence, by the way, even taken alone, of the nothingness of their help. That all but fainting yet Divine, humanity, those three loving yet slumbering disciples, that gracious ministering angel, give us a true picture and representation of the whole ministry of our Lord. The power of His endurance all along was more or less on the strain; all along His ability to endure came not from below but above. As for man's help, the help of His disciples, of His nearest kinsman, even of His own mother herself (Luke ii. 49, John ii. 4), it had only been the help of a lagging

companion, of a blind guide, of a sleeping sentinel, of blundering love, at the best—a prodigious increase, in fact, and not a diminution, of the difficulties of His course. It was not *by* His brethren, it was *notwithstanding* them, that He effected His great work.

Consider, therefore, in conclusion, the exceeding greatness of that work—I mean its exceeding cost to Himself. We often speak, and speak rightly, of the atoning sacrifice of Christ's death; but those are right who remind us, also, of the continuous sacrifice of His life. This lonely, companionless, arduous, misunderstood life of sorrows was all part of the Saviour's offering, part of the purchase of our peace. All the sufferings of Christ, and not the last only, were endured for our sakes. It was the last step of all, no doubt, that sealed all; the bitterest portion of the cup was, most assuredly, in its dregs; and there would have been no atonement, no redemption, no saving efficacy, we are often taught, without the actual shedding of Christ's blood. Not even the cross itself was sufficient for this end; it was the death on the cross that summed all. But for that identical reason, every thing there summed up had its place and its weight, and was one part, therefore, and an important part of the many "stripes" He endured. May we not even say, that without these, the "satisfaction" would have been incomplete? How could the final drops have been partaken of unless the rest of the cup were first drained? The thing to be noticed, therefore, is this, that in that

whole sacrifice, that whole life of endurance, the Saviour was unaided and alone. When grief hopes for nothing else it hopes for sympathy at the least. No one had less of this at the time than He who lived and died for mankind !

XI.

GOSPEL GEOGRAPHY.

"Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."—*Acts. i. 8.*

This is a description of the world, we may almost say, as seen from above. The pressure of our Lord's foot on the earth was every moment growing less; in a few moments it would have ceased altogether, and He would have ascended into heaven. As each syllable of these words was spoken, another of His last moments was passing away for ever. The passage, therefore, presents us with His parting view of the world—His parting thoughts about men. Considered thus, I seem to note in it, First, Marks of great Wisdom; and secondly, Tokens of great Love.

I. GREAT WISDOM. Our Lord's words have a remarkably distributive force; they divide the inhabitants of the world into three principal groups. There is, first, "Jerusalem and all Judea," an expression comprising all those "who had the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law." The inhabitants of

“Samaria” are next mentioned, people who had the same form of knowledge and truth to a certain extent, but not equally pure and unmixed. Round these two central groups, lie the multitudinous nations which stretch away from them, even to “the uttermost parts of the earth,” and which are all alike so far as this point, that they have only a mere glimmering of God’s truth. If we translate this three-fold division into more modern methods of expression, the result will be this:—Jerusalem and all Judea will answer to mere orthodoxy without life; the outer nations will be represented by the various forms of paganism and absolute infidelity: and Samaria will correspond to that debatable land of heresy and schism, which touches the purest truth on the one side and the deadliest error on the other. The three together make up the whole of mankind, with the exception, of course, of those persons whom our Saviour did not specify, because He was speaking to their representatives at that time: I mean those who, like the apostles, have a living hold upon Christ, and who endeavour by their lips and lives, to bear witness to Him among men. Apart from these, the rest of the world breaks up into the three groups we have named, viz., men whose opinions are quite sound, men whose opinions are all but totally false, and men whose opinions, as it were, are piebald, neither all white nor wholly black, “part iron and part clay.” When persons are confident and conceited about their own orthodoxy, they are often disposed to *obliterate this “mixed multitude” class entirely, and*

to regard its many varieties as all black. It is to be noticed, therefore, and admired, that our Saviour's description in the text gives a distinct place to "Samaria," small and despised though it was.

To the world, then, thus briefly but fully described, the apostles were to go; and to go with one object only, as you will find from our text. For all of these three several divisions, with all their varied evils, only one remedy was proposed, viz., the testimony of Jesus. And it was equally fitted for all three. The best way, for example, to give life to a dead and barren orthodoxy is to bear witness to a living Christ. "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord." The best way to deal with heresy and schism, is to do as Christ Himself did with the woman of Samaria, viz., to go down beneath all surface-questions of places and forms of worship to the deeper questions of God's nature, and of man's sin, and of His own mission to mankind. "God is a Spirit." "He whom thou now hast is not thy husband." "I that speak unto thee am the Christ." And the best way, also, to meet infidelity, whether it be the infidelity of ignorance, or that of supposed superior knowledge, is by just the same rule. No one can disbelieve in Christ who really knows Him. Peter denied Him, Judas betrayed Him, and the devils entreated Him to let them alone; but they, none of them, disbelieved in Him. Even the Pharisees, who ascribed His miracles to Beelzebub, and those modern writers who seek to explain them away, equally imply, that if really His, and really His

doing, they prove Him to be Christ. There is but one remedy, therefore, for such unbelievers, and for all spiritual evil in the world—for a dead faith, or a corrupt faith, or no faith at all, viz., to proclaim Christ as He is. The Spirit who is to convince the world, and to guide the Church into all truth, adopts this same plan. He “takes of the things of Christ, and shows them unto” us.

II. GREAT MERCY, I think, also, may be traced in these words. The occasion on which they were spoken did not admit, as we have seen, of much speech. Many words, at such a juncture, would have interfered with the effect of one another, and would hardly have been remembered to good purpose by those who heard them. We are all of us influenced by this truth when making our farewells; and confine ourselves, therefore, on such occasions, to the most important topics, and the fewest possible words. Whatever we say then is understood to have a peculiar value in our eyes, especially if it be something unimportant in itself; so that the mention at such a time of a seeming trifle shows that we do not consider it to be such in real truth. May we not infer the same thing about these farewell words of the Lord? None of His words were spoken in order to fall to the ground, least of all these which were spoken as His last upon earth. It is on this ground I believe that there were special reasons for the mention of Samaria in our text; and that it was not inserted merely *because* Samaria lay next to Judea; nor yet, only, I

think, as above explained, by way of completing the circle of the various classes of mankind. Other Bible descriptions of the world in connection with the work of evangelization, only divide it into two classes, viz., the Jew and the Greek; and yet they are complete enough in their way. I only know, indeed, of one other threefold Scriptural division, and that was from the same lips on a previous occasion, but in a precisely opposite direction. "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And this at once suggests to us one reason of the special mention in our text, viz., to show that that other command was now no longer in force—like the preamble to an Act of Parliament reciting all the previous Acts it repeals. And it also suggests to us a further object, viz., that of meeting the special prejudices of the disciples, who would never have thought of preaching Christ to "Samaria," without distinct instructions to that effect. If this be so, therefore, you see here an illustration of the Saviour's perpetual solicitude for the erring and despised; you hear His parting warning against intolerance of every description, His remembrance of the people of Samaria, (where He had received much kindness, but much unkindness also,) as though in "making His will." Consider what these Samaritans were—heretics, schismatics, bigots, if ever there have been such in the world. Consider how they were regarded—"He is a Samaritan and has a devil." Consider how they were treated—if any man even

spoke to them it was regarded as a marvel. Yet a message of love was here sent to them, and that by special legacy and bequest.

There is much instruction here for instructors. Do you wish to oppose error, to prevent the growth of superstition, to convince the infidel and the gain-sayer? Bear witness to Jesus Christ: by your words, if such be your vocation; in any case, by your deeds. The best controversial class in the world is a class of men that adorn the Gospel. The best answer to the infidel is to shew that you yourself take God at His word. I do not say that no other answers or classes are required; but no others without these are worth anything; and these must be our mainstay. The real defence of Christianity is to be found in Christ Himself.

Here is much warning, also, for the zealous. Every earnest man has his own Samaritans, men who being the nearest to him in some respects, are most opposed to him in many others, and so of all men provoke him most. These are just the persons whom the Saviour on this very account commends by name to your love. You are not really free from bigotry till you are free from it about them.

Lastly, here is encouragement for the lowly. Some of the last words of Christ here below were on behalf of the humble and despised! When Himself on the very confines of Heaven, the tenderest light of His mercy streams down on their heads!

No. XII.

THE ADVANTAGES OF POVERTY.

"He knew not ought he had, save the bread which he did eat."—*Gen.* xxxix. 6.

There is a strong family likeness between all kinds of empiricism. Those patent remedies which are so largely advertised in the papers are never really able to accomplish all the incompatible wonders there alleged; but neither, perhaps, are they in any case altogether without value. There is some ingredient or principle involved in all of them which it is not safe to despise: for no amount of wind can blow even a bubble out of nothing. It is the same with such religious remedies as vows of poverty, and so on. Although they cannot do all that their votaries imagine and assert, yet there must be something of some value within them, or they could not maintain their ground as they do. It is the part of wisdom to seek what this something is. With this object, let us proceed to enquire—First, What kind of poverty is really beneficial; and, Secondly, What kind of benefits it secures.

I. WHAT KIND OF POVERTY IS BENEFICIAL? We

shall see this best, as we do a house in a street, from the opposite side of the way. What do we understand by being rich? If a man does not comprehend the value of money—if he is not aware that he can obtain in exchange for it many things which are of great use and convenience—and if he allows it, in consequence, when placed in his hand, to drop out of his palm on the ground, such a man, of course, is too foolish to take care of himself. He is an example of imbecility, not of grace. But there are many, unhappily, who hurry away from this extreme to a worse; who attribute a value to worldly substance far beyond its true worth; and who, not content with regarding it with respect as a means, almost worship it as an end. That profane expression, “the almighty dollar,” and that much abused declaration, that “money answereth all things,” summarize the real creed of such men. To be able to say, “I have”—to enjoy the taste of possession, as it were, on the palate—to look on their land, or stock, or jewels, and to think to themselves, “They are mine”—this is their object and delight. There is a story of a celebrated singer to whom a costly bracelet was presented by our Queen, and who acknowledged afterwards, that, in the very act of receiving it, she had endeavoured to form an estimate of its weight and its worth. That was an extreme case of the kind. Another case is that in the Gospel, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years.” The feature to be noticed in every case, is not the fact of wealth, but the feeling of it. It is *the worship that makes the idol*. We have spoken of

those who allow money to drop when placed in their hands: these men lay hold of it with a clutch.

Somewhere between the two, lies the poverty (so to call it) which we refer to. To hold without grasping, "to have as though we had not, to buy as though we possessed not," (1 Cor. vii. 30, 31), appears about the right mark. What is said in our text concerning Joseph's master may be employed as an illustration. His possessions, both in the house and the field, were evidently very considerable, and were never, in fact, more considerable than at this particular time (ver. 5). Yet he never paid them less attention than he did at this time. Give him what he required for his necessities, he left all the rest to his slave. So you may now sometimes find men of very great wealth, yet so simple, temperate, and unpretending, in all their surroundings and habits, that no mere stranger would ever be aware of the great extent of their wealth. Such persons do not impress others with the idea of their opulence, because they are not much impressed with it themselves. This is not only very good breeding, but good Christianity, too. To trust our blessed Master as Potiphar trusted his slave, and to be half unconscious in consequence of the "accident" of being wealthy, is a real "fruit of the Spirit." On the other hand, to be poor in this world, to have little or nothing earthly to rely on for the future, and yet to be free from anxiety for the morrow, is a fruit of the Spirit also, and of very much the same kind. There is a levelling process, in short, in both cases—a "levelling up" or down, as

required—a happy “equality,” as in the gathering of the manna (2 Cor. viii. 15); different roads, but one end, and one heavenly Guide. Such is the rich poverty of true faith! He that hath is as though he had not; he that hath not is as though he had.

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF THIS KIND OF POVERTY are next to be considered, The first and most immediate of these, perhaps, is deliverance from anxiety. The idea of property and the feeling of care are like substance and shadow; the solidity of the one involves inevitably the darkness of the other. Wherever there is anything too precious to be lost, anything which the heart is set on, anything (as we say) to be “taken care” of, there the pangs of care must, of course, be experienced. If the sense of “having” is sweet to excess, the sense of “losing” must be correspondingly bitter. But in this world of uncertainty and evil there is always a danger of losing; there is no possible investment of capital, no source of profit, no description of industry, which is not exposed to the risk of submergence, either partial or entire. Millions have experienced this before now: millions must again; and any one may. It is on this account that there is no peace to a covetous man. Like a traveller encumbered by excess of luggage, he is never quite at his ease, and is never sufficiently at leisure from his own responsibility to appreciate the agreeables of the route. Such a man is too vulnerable by far to be happy; and has often to confess at the last, *that he might have passed along the journey of life*

with far fewer frowns on his forehead, if he had only known, like this Egyptian Potiphar, "the bread which he ate." Is it not so (Matt. vi. 26) with the birds of heaven; and who can sing as they do? Is it not so, also, with the angels of God? I apprehend that there is not much property, as we understand it, in heaven.

But, further, there are many temptations—subtle, sore, and especially perilous—from which a man is delivered by this anti-covetous state of feeling. From thinking too much of "I have," to thinking too little of "You haven't;" from love of a bargain, to hard measures; from hard measures to equivocal ones; and from equivocal to plainly unjust ones—all this is a scarcely perceptible and extremely slippery slide. "They that will be rich,"—will become so or will remain so—"fall into temptation and a snare," etc. This is a point to be much remembered in this competitive age by all who call themselves by Christ's name. Property, the jurists say, is adverse possession. When I say of a thing, "It is mine," I mean that it is "mine" and not "yours," and not any one else's, in fact, among men. This is a principle which cannot be helped, and which ought not to be trifled with, in this world; and those who profess to rise above it sink a good way beneath it, as a rule. There must be property, in this sense, if there is to be society at all, as things are; and "mine" and "thine" must of necessity be thus adversely distinguished wherever "I" and "thou" are not one. At the same time, this identical principle, which is the foundation of all honesty, when confined to

its legitimate vocation, becomes the source of all forms of dishonesty, when pushed to excess. Against this perpetual danger, therefore, be perpetually on your guard.

But this is not all. The love of money is not only "the root of all evil;" it is a deadly evil in itself. "Covetousness is idolatry." It is wholly incompatible with serving God. (Luke xvi. 13.) The great remedy, therefore, against it is a loving trust in Almighty God, in the Gospel of His Son. If the Fatherhood of God were more felt—His especial Fatherhood, I mean, towards all those who are sealed with the earnest of His Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of His Son—there would be neither call nor possibility of this exaggerated love of having. You have noticed how it is with little children in many a home in this land. They know that they are fed, and clothed, and sheltered, and that this is done for them by the love of their parents; but, wise in their sweet simplicity, they neither know nor care to know anything more. For the full realization of the same feeling in the great Christian family, we must wait apparently for that happy day when we shall all of us "eat bread in the kingdom of heaven." Meanwhile, the nearer we approach to it on earth, the nearer we are both to the holiness and to the happiness of heaven; and the farther we are from that idolatry which God is so sure to chastise!

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